# PERFORMANCE MEASUREMENT MATTERS

## INSIDE

## County Kicks Off ICMA Comparative Performance Measurement

In Fairfax County, we have been measuring performance for many years – first as management indicators, and then as the current family of measures included in the annual budget document. One of the key principles throughout this effort has been that the measures NOT merely be presented in the annual budget, but that they be USED to monitor and improve agency performance. Since the current methodology has been used for the past three years, we've developed trend data to compare performance over time. But that is just one method of comparison.

It is now time to look externally to see how we compare to other jurisdictions. A group of city and county managers facing this same challenge in 1994 approached the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) to provide assistance to local governments in measuring, comparing, and improving service delivery. Their efforts resulted in the creation of ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement. Participants in the Center provide descriptive information and service delivery data for their jurisdictions using questionnaires (templates) developed by a number of program experts from local governments working with ICMA staff. Once the data are cleaned, evaluated, and compiled, members have electronic access to the information. A printed report is also produced. Data are collected in five major areas: police, fire/ EMS, neighborhood services, support services, and youth services.

Local governments can use the performance information to identify program strengths and weaknesses, as well as indicate opportunities for improvement. Fairfax County is especially interested in expanding the pool of jurisdictions with whom we can compare ourselves to obtain this type of information. Approximately 120 cities and counties are currently participating. A problem common to benchmarking is getting the cooperation of similar organizations to provide the necessary data. Since membership in ICMA's Center for Performance Measurement is entirely voluntary, those participating are committed to providing data and working to continuously improve – the type of partners Fairfax County would like to have.

The data templates were received and distributed to the affected agencies in August 2000. After the agencies had a chance to review them, a trainer provided by ICMA provided half-day training designed to introduce the approach so everyone would have a clear idea of where we are going with this initiative. County Executive Tony Griffin opened that training session with an introduction of why Fairfax County is participating (to continuously improve) and what we hope to gain from the effort. Trainer Amy Paul faced a packed room, indicating a high level of interest in the topic.

Following the morning training, individual meetings were held with all the agencies that are required to complete a template. Many good questions were asked, some of which could be answered on the spot, while others must be forwarded to ICMA. The first year of this effort will be a learning experience. We may not be able to provide all the requested information this time around. However, we are committed to learning the process and improving over time. If anyone is interested in learning more about the Center for Performance Measurement, go to http://www.icma.org and look under Programs (Center for Performance Measurement) for more information.

## ON IMPROVEMENT

Where we cannot invent,
we may at least improve.

— *Charles C. Colton*

## DASHBOARD MEASURES: USING MEASUREMENT TO MANAGE

**By Laura Golberg**
**Department of Information Technology**

"Measurements should direct managers to those parts that need their attention."
    - Eli Goldratt, Harvard Business Review,
        March-April 1998

In the first article in this series, "Keeping the Main Thing the Main Thing" (April 2000), we discussed identifying an organization's mission. The second article, "Does It Matter? Goal Setting for Organizations" (July 2000) addressed setting the goals that will work toward fulfilling that mission. The next step is to identify which measures you should use to monitor the achievement of those goals. Guidance on how to identify performance indicators can be found in the *Fairfax County Measures Up* manual as well as in various training courses offered by the Department of Management and Budget. This article addresses the identification of those <u>few</u> measures that can provide managers with vital information necessary to monitor the significant aspects of their organizations.

Everyone is familiar with a car's dashboard that tells key information regarding the condition and operation of the vehicle. The dashboard display identifies the essential measures that show whether or not we are progressing toward our goals. In a car, for example, our goal is to arrive at our destination safely, without breakdowns or a speeding ticket. To measure the progress toward this goal, we have gauges on the dashboard that report speed, the amount of fuel in the gas tank, RPM, and coolant temperature. Tire pressure and battery fluid levels are not considered necessary dashboard information and are not usually displayed. As with many indicators, you would still want to keep track of them, but in trying to hone in on the most critical dashboard measures, not every indicator is of constant and immediate priority. As with a dashboard's priorities, managers identify the one or two measures that would yield information vital to the success of their groups' work. These may

be outcome, efficiency, service quality, and possibly even output measures.

We must select measures to produce data that will alert managers when problems arise. The issue being measured must be under the control of the manager[1] and/or capable of being resolved. For example, lightning strikes are not under the control of the County, but we can certainly take measures to protect our equipment and computers, and can measure how effectively we are protecting them. There may be a couple of key measures to be used on the dashboard, such as percent of PCs recovered after a lightning storm in order to track this issue. Some of the dashboard measures used by agencies measuring information technology functions include the increase in the usage of a particular technology by the public, user satisfaction, and the average number of business days to fulfill service requests.

Selecting the dashboard measures is only the beginning. Reliable collection mechanisms must be established for any measures where the data are not already being recorded. Data from the dashboard measures must be reported to managers as often as they need the information, usually quarterly. A situation may be sufficiently volatile that monthly or even weekly reports are needed to enable managers to understand what is happening and take necessary action. The reports must also be presented in a way that is meaningful to managers. Graphs and forecasts might accompany data in tables.

In summary, dashboard measures allow managers to identify and track the central issues within an organization. They "direct managers to those parts that need their attention."

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[1]The next article in this series will address how to approach measuring a process that is not under the control of a single manager.

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### MORE ON IMPROVEMENT

There's always room for improvement. It's the biggest room in the house.

— *Louise Heath Leber*

## For Your Information

Jim was assigned a research project on top of his regular duties. Because of staff vacancies in his agencies, he was already carrying the workload of two positions. Now this project! He really wanted to do a good job because the research project was tied to a suggestion he made a month ago to his agency director. But he knew that just tracking down the materials to help him support his suggestion would be a time-consuming task. Still, he wished he had the research skills that would eliminate a lot of the trial and error involved in finding the appropriate resources. If only he had a research expert available to help him… And he does!

In the summer of 1999, the Fairfax County Public Library introduced a new research service for Fairfax County managers and staff. It is called **Information Central** and is located in Suite 329 of the Government Center. **Information Central** is there to assist you in locating articles, statistics, documents, and other resources for work-related subject areas.

Information Specialist MaryAnn Sheehan coordinates this service. A member of the Library staff for more than 15 years, Ms. Sheehan is an accomplished researcher. She has access to various databases, the Internet, the Library's 2.2 million-item collection, the collections of other library systems, government agencies, trade associations, and subject matter experts to find the information you need. Keep in mind that she will locate the information for you, but you still need to do the analysis. Nevertheless, this is an extremely valuable resource for a workforce always striving to be more productive.

Ms. Sheehan is also available to attend meetings with agency staff to discuss the services available. If your agency, task force or work group needs research assistance, **Information Central** can help. A number of County agencies have already benefited from Ms. Sheehan's research expertise gained through her extensive experience as a librarian. Examples of the diverse subjects which Ms. Sheehan has researched for staff include: parenting resources for adoptive parents, potential vendors for County bids, materials for a

mediation workshop, statistics on education spending in Virginia, incentives for landlords of Section 8 housing, and training costs per employee in the private sector. You can make a research request by contacting Ms. Sheehan by telephone, e-mail or fax:

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## Grading Governments Discussed at Regional Meeting

If you saw the February 2000 issue of *Governing* magazine, you are familiar with the report card on urban management where several journalists partnered with the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University in an effort to evaluate how well government is managed. Attendees at the September 26, 2000 Regional Performance Measurement Consortium hosted by Fairfax County were able to hear about this effort from one of those involved since the beginning — Dr. Philip Joyce, professor of Public Administration at George Washington University. Dr. Joyce taught at the Maxwell School when *Governing* magazine approached them about collaborating on this effort and he continues to work with the project in his current position.

The goals of the Government Performance Project are to:
- Inform the public about what contributes to effective government management
- Enable governments to learn from each other
- Recognize changes (improvement) in management over time
- Document the importance of management in achieving results

This project has been ongoing since 1996 and has resulted in the evaluation of all 50 states, 20 federal agencies, and 35 large cities. The evaluation encompasses five categories: financial management, human resource management, capital management, information technology, and managing for results. It is anticipated that counties will be rated for the February 2002 issue. Since the focus is generally on the larger jurisdictions, Fairfax County can expect to get the survey in May 2001.